

CHAPTER FIVE

... And They Loved the Lord Their God

The Mormon pioneers in their westward trek sought an area where religious freedom would be unquestioned. Bitter persecutions in the east and mid-west had forced them to leave established communities and search for new homes on the western frontier.

When Zion was established in the tops of the mountains near the Great Salt Lake, President Brigham Young was both leader of the Church and head of the civil government. This mixture of Church and state proved entirely fair because only members of the Church lived in the area.

Later developments, however, and an influx of non-Church members forced a separation and the appointment of civil officials in the territory by officers of the federal government.

As the central settlement of Salt Lake City became established and the community grew, President Young called faithful members of the Church to begin colonizing the outlying areas. Valleys that showed promise of sufficient water and livable climates were scouted and plans were made for settlements.

Those who left their homes in Salt Lake or other established areas often suffered extreme privation before they conquered the elements and created homes and farms to sustain themselves. Moving into an area, they first had to select farm and home sites that appeared suitable. The land had to be cleared and irrigation waters controlled. Logs had to be hewn for homes and buildings. These dwellings usually had dirt floors, dirt roofs and mud packed into the cracks between the logs.

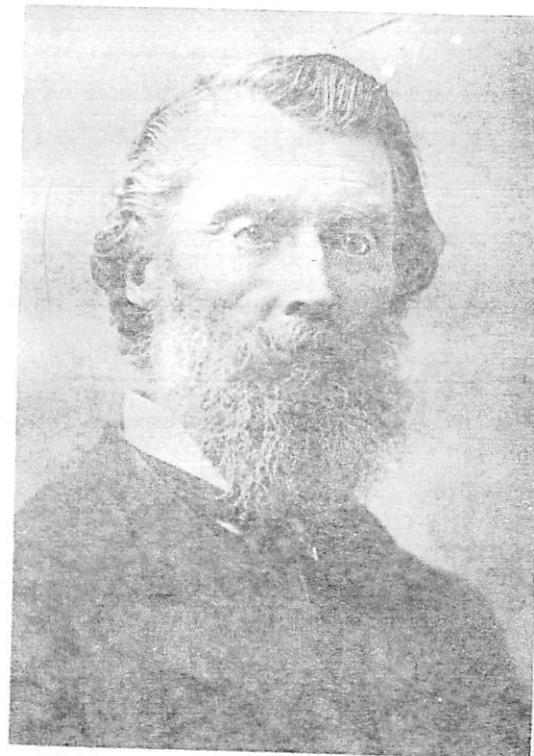
Yet, in spite of hardships that would have caused a less hardy people to give up and return to the areas that others before them had won from the wilderness, these people kept on struggling until victory was theirs.

The motivating influence that helped them endure the struggles of winning a new land was a firm faith that what they were doing was inspired of God. Believing in the divine mission of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, they knew that their pioneering work would open the way for others to carry on the work of God on the earth.

As members of the Church moved into the Wasatch or Provo Valley area they quickly built churches in which to worship and renew their faith and conviction. The first group that moved into the valley selected William Meeks to be their spiritual leader. However, when Elder Meeks chose not to make a permanent home in the valley, William Madison Wall was named presiding elder over the new valley, and given authority to conduct Church business.

The first chapel, a log structure 20x40 feet, was built in time for the Pioneer Day celebration, July 24, 1860, and served the saints for nearly five years. Though it was small and its furnishings crude, it was accepted in the sight of the Lord. Those who came within its walls to worship were blessed abundantly with His spirit.

Because the people had faith that their new valley would be fruitful and yield food to sustain their lives, they were blessed profusely by the Lord. Their numbers grew rapidly and in 1861 the officials of the Church felt a ward should be organized.



JOSEPH STACY MURDOCK
First Bishop of Heber City

A familiar pattern in early Church government was followed as President Young and the general authorities established the ward in Heber. Joseph S. Murdock, not a resident of the valley, yet a man who had proved his ability in Church leadership, was ordained as bishop of the new ward. Under the direction of Church officials he moved with his family to Heber City and set about to organize the new ward. This pattern of calling Bishops and Stake Presidents was followed for many years by President Young and his successors, and proved to be a valuable train-



The children of Joseph Stacy Murdock, first bishop of Heber City. Most of them spent their lives in Wasatch County. Seated, left to right, Ann Coleman; Margaret Murray, Ellen C. (Lottie) Wright, Jane Hilton. Back row, left to right, Parley A. Murdock, Andrew Murdock, Alva Murdock, William Murdock, David N. Murdock, John H. Murdock and Frank Murdock.

ing program for leadership. Those of experienced leadership quickly trained their counselors and local brethren and then were often called to other areas, leaving Church administration in the hands of those they had trained.

Bishop Murdock chose men of the area as his counselors. They were John W. Witt and Thomas Rasband with John Hamilton as ward clerk. In addition to presiding over Heber Ward, these men also directed Church affairs throughout the valley.

Under Bishop Murdock's direction, presiding elders were appointed in the communities that by this time were large enough to meet separately. John Harvey was named at Center Creek in 1861 and Sidney Epperson was called as presiding elder in 1862 for the upper Snake Creek settlement. In 1864 David Van Wagonen was sustained as presiding elder for the lower Snake Creek area and John Watkins of Midway was later appointed to preside in Charleston and traveled there to hold meetings on Sunday.

The calling of Bishop Murdock in Heber Ward lasted until 1867 when he was called by President Young to move to Southern Utah and attempt to raise cotton there. During his six years in Wasatch County he gained the love and respect of the people for his kindness and gen-

osity. He was also respected by the Indians because he had reared a young Indian girl and then later married her.

John W. Witt acted as bishop of the ward temporarily for several months and in December, 1867, President Young appointed Abram Hatch of Lehi, Utah County, as the new bishop of the ward.

Near Christmas time he left Utah County with his family and started for Heber and his new calling. It happened to be a very cold, rainy day and the canyon roads were bad, so William Averett, Robert Lindsay and Orson Hickin were dispatched to help the new bishop and his family make the journey.

His coming to the valley opened a new era in the lives of the people, for not only was Bishop Hatch an able Church administrator but he was also a man of sound business and financial judgment. Leaders called in the past had been particularly fitted for the pioneering work of the new area, but the community was established now and growing rapidly. The business experience of Bishop Hatch was to serve the people well during the 33 years he held positions of Church leadership in the area.

In addition to establishing a community store and strengthening the Church organization, Bishop Hatch encouraged the people to build better and more convenient homes and more adequate roads. He also played an important role in construction of a canal that benefited the people of Heber and vicinity for many years.

During 1872 and 1873 Bishop Hatch directed the building of a social hall on main street. It was used for town meetings, Church services, dances and theatrical performances and served for many years.

Then in 1877 the area had grown sufficiently that the Church officials decided to organize a stake in the area. On July 14 and 15, 1877, Elders John Taylor and Franklin D. Richards of the Council of the Twelve Apostles came to Heber to effect the organization.

Bishop Hatch was called as the first stake president with Thomas H. Giles as first counselor and Henry S. Alexander, second counselor. Charles Shelton was sustained as stake clerk. High councilmen sustained were Joseph S. Murdock, John W. Witt, Isaac Baum, John Muir, James J. Howe, John McDonald, Gustavus Johnson, Henry McMullin, Sr., George W. Brown, Attewall Wootton, Sr., Henry Clegg and Daniel Bigelow.

At the same time Heber was divided into two wards with all those living east of Main Street included in the East Ward and all those west of Main Street in the West Ward. Thomas Rasband was ordained bishop of the East Ward with John Muir and Harmon Cummings as counselors and William Forman was chosen to head the West Ward with John Crook and George T. Giles as his counselors.

The stake, as organized, extended into Uintah County on the east, north into what is now Summit County and covered all of Wasatch

FIRST WASATCH COUNTY STAKE PRESIDENCY



President Abram Hatch

Thomas H. Giles
First CounselorHenry S. Alexander
Second Counselor

County. The wards at that time were Heber East, Heber West, Midway, Wallsburg, Charleston, Buysville, Upper Daniels, Center, Lake Creek, Francis, Benchcreek, Elkhorn, Riverdale and Woodland. In Uintah County there were Ashley Center, Mill District, Ashley Fork and Merrill Wards.

Some of the stake officers appointed at the time of stake organization were Thomas Todd, president of the Elders Quorum with Orson Hicken and Henry Ohlwiler as counselors. John M. Murdock was named president of the High Priests Quorum with John Jordan and Charles N. Carroll as counselors. Thomas Rasband was appointed to preside over the priests. Thomas Hicken Sr. to preside over teachers and J. Heber Moulton over the deacons. William Forman was named to act as the agent for the Presiding Bishop of the Church. Emma Brown

was chosen as president of the stake Relief Society, with Mary Daybell and Sarah Alexander as counselors.

According to the stake statistical report of February 3, 1878, the membership of Wasatch Stake totaled 2,296 persons and 392 families. There were 90 High Priests, 40 Seventies, 162 Elders, 16 Priests, 33 Teachers, 34 Deacons, 1,141 other members and 780 children under eight years of age.

By 1887, ten years after the stake was organized, President Hatch realized the need for a stake house or stake tabernacle. In that year he rallied the people to the cause and built the entire structure with donated labor and materials. Cost of the building was more than \$30,000. However, all donated their quota either in labor, materials or cash and the project went forward rapidly. Youngsters, and some older people, would save pennies and nickels and when they had accumulated 25 or 30 cents, make a contribution to the project.

President Hatch himself served as superintendent of the project with Elisha Averett in charge of the masonry work and Alex Fortie directing the carpentry work. The shingles, on the tower of the building, were cut from sheet metal and placed by Frederick O. Buell. Francis Kirby did the painting. The red sandstone was quarried by hand from mountains east of Heber in Lake Creek.

The building was ready for dedication May 5, 1889, and Elder Francis M. Lyman of the Council of the Twelve came for the dedication. An item in the "Wasatch Wave" of May 4, 1889 noted the event as follows:

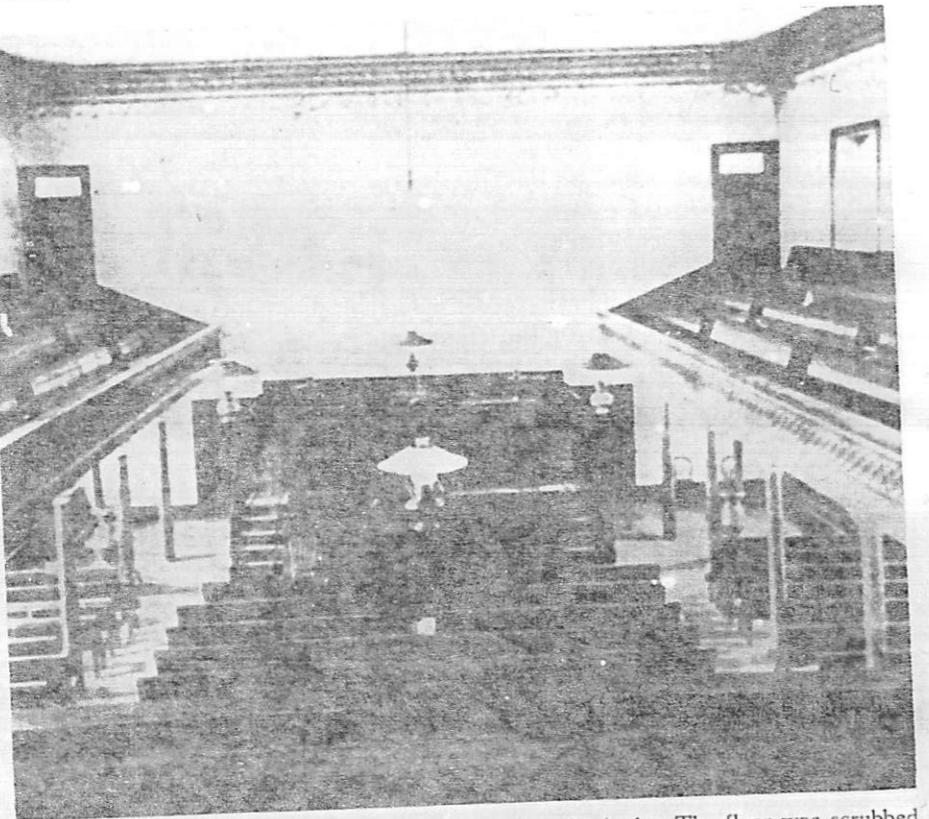
"The Stake House is finished and cleaned in beautiful style ready



The Wasatch Stake Tabernacle
The building was constructed between 1887 and 1889.

for dedication tomorrow. Conference visitors are expected to clean their feet before entering the building and leave their knives and pencils and tobacco at home."

Then in the "Wave" issue of May 11, 1889, the following was reported:



Interior of the Wasatch Stake House as it was originally built. The floor was scrubbed and bleached with home made soap. Home made carpets were laid down the aisles. Coal oil lamps hanging from the ceiling furnished light. Pot bellied stoves in each corner. There were balconies on both sides and the end. Posts on either side to support the gallery which had three tiers of seats on different elevations. The stand had three elevations of seats—the top row was always occupied by the stake presidency and the general authorities. The middle row by the high council and the lower row by the ward bishops.

"The greatest number of people ever congregated in Heber at one time was at the dedication of the Stake House last Sunday and Monday. There were 1300 people in the Stake House on Sunday afternoon and it was stated 200 more could be comfortably seated."

The original plan of the building had an entrance foyer much as it is now, with steps leading into the front gallery. A large assembly room,

with the "stand" at the west end, made up the main part of the building. The stand consisted of three elevations of seats. The top seats were reserved for the stake presidency and general authorities. On the middle row of seats were members of the stake high council, while bishops sat on the third row of seats. On each row of seats was a pulpit. Galleries were on the end, north and south sides, with four elevations of seats.

Through the east gallery was an entrance that led up winding steps to the tower where a large bell was hung. This bell was rung each Sunday morning at 9:30 to remind the Saints of Sunday School, and again at 1:30 p.m. to remind them of Sacrament meeting. The bell was also used as a fire alarm or for any other important circumstance that warranted a gathering of the people. For funerals the bell was very slowly tolled as the cortege approached the stake house.

From the diary of Elizabeth Lindsay comes the following description of the building's heating system:

"The four big 'pot bellied' stoves were very important. Uncle Jessie Bond, the janitor for 30 years, went religiously from one to the other stirring them noisily and replenishing the coal and then would disappear into the back room to see about the fire there. If the stirrings came in the middle of a solo or at the climax of a great sermon it made no difference. President Hatch who had traveled outside the state used to tell us about heating plants which might be installed to take the place of these stoves and it sounded fantastic to us."

A definite seating arrangement was prescribed for the building, with men on the south side, women on the north side, ladies with babies around the stoves in the corners and mixed couples in the center. The four stoves stood in the four corners of the building, with considerable space reserved for them.

At the rear, or west end of the building was a smaller meeting room, always called the "back room." Groups such as the Relief Society, Primary or MIA met in this room. Above this back room was a room called the "circle room" where the high council and stake presidency met to hold their prayer circles.

In the main assembly room the pulpit on the lower row of seats on the stand extended the full width of the stand. This was used for the Sacrament service. Beautiful silver urns, 16 to 18 inches tall were carried by the Deacons down the aisles as they watched very closely to see when it was necessary to refill the large silver cup that was passed from person to person along the benches. The silver was always highly polished for the sacrament and the white linen clothes were always freshly laundered and pressed without a wrinkle.

The red sandstone "Stake House" or Stake Tabernacle as it has come to be called, was the crowning achievement in Church buildings in the county up to that time and is still being used in 1961 as the center of all stake activities. In 1929 the large cottonwood trees on the grounds